



San Juan National Forest

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News Release

San Juan National Forest Announces Release of Decisions for the Hermosa Creek Watershed Management Plan and Travel Management Project.

DURANGO, Colorado – December 20, 2017– The San Juan National Forest is announcing that decisions have been signed which finalize the *Hermosa Creek Watershed Management Plan* and *Recreation and Travel Management Project*. This comes after three years of public involvement and analysis resulting from a grass-roots effort that led to watershed protection legislation signed into law in 2014. Community interest stayed high throughout the entire process, and the Forest Service wishes to thank community members who put in many hours of collaboration during this process. The resulting decisions provide a balance of uses while protecting and preserving the watershed.

A planning level decision establishes long-term overarching guidance for the watershed in the form of a Forest Plan amendment. A project level travel management decision includes route-by-route designations of authorized types of use and seasons of use, and other decisions related to recreation infrastructure.

The decisions provide for:

- Restricting all motorized and mechanized (bike) travel to designated roads and trails, as legislatively required.
- Preservation of existing landscape character by including a guideline for “no net gain” in trail miles, and adding seasonal closures to all roads and most trails.
- Upcoming opening of two new trails to bike use.
- Proactive management of emerging e-bike use by allowing them on certain trails.
- Authorization of a new campground to replace an outdated one, and to address resource impacts.
- Improved water quality and streambank protection by restricting driving off-road for dispersed camping along Road 578, authorizing 2 bridges at road stream crossings, and by removing over 50 miles of closed roads from the system.
- Preserving dispersed camping opportunities by designating camp spur roads.
- Improving public safety by providing for an OHV bypass and eliminating motorized mixed use on a dangerous segment of Road 578.
- Expanding acreage open for over-snow motorized use.
- Enhancing the character of wilderness by eliminating extraneous trails.
- Releasing remnants of recommended wilderness.
- Managing vegetation for resiliency in response to environmental uncertainty.
- Unrestricted use by foot and horse.

Additionally, as a result of objection resolutions, the Forest Service Regional Office instructed these changes be included in the decision:

- To allow more flexible management in the future, trails within the ski area permit boundary will be managed by terms defined in the ski area permit instead of becoming FS system trails, and will not be bound by the “no net gain” trail guideline or by the same seasonal closure dates.
- To allow the option for longer trail seasons, condition-based seasonal management of trails within elk winter concentration areas will be allowed, subject to compliance. Condition-based criteria have not been defined yet.
- To allow for more recreation opportunity, the Hermosa Creek, Big Lick, and Elbert Creek Trails and the Lower Hermosa Road will remain open for mechanize (bike) use year-round.

A stand-alone management plan reflecting all the details of the chosen alternative and final decisions will be available in January. In the meantime, the EA and signed Decision Notices are available on the website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=43010>

For additional information, please contact District Ranger Matt Janowiak or Project Leader Cam Hooley at the Columbine Ranger District at 970-884-2512.

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